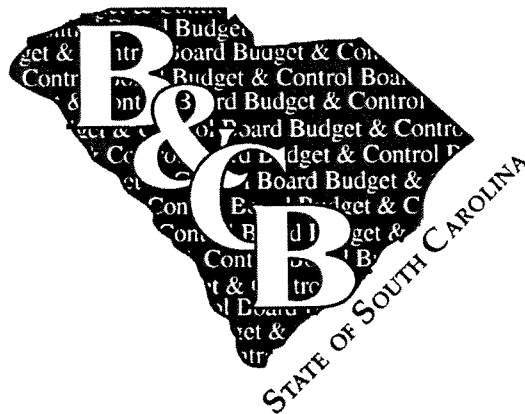


May 27, 2004

State Government News Summary



**Prepared by the Budget and Control Board
Office of the Executive Director**



Posted on Wed, May. 26, 2004

Legislators deal with clog of Sanford's budget vetoes

JENNIFER HOLLAND
Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. - Gov. Mark Sanford said House members acted recklessly when they took only two hours to override all but one of his 106 state budget vetoes with little or no debate on Wednesday.

Sanford said he questioned whether it was election-year politics driving lawmakers to rely too much on one-time money or funds that may not materialize.

"The idea of saying we're not going to debate any of these issues... is a bit reckless," said Sanford, who said his administration took a lot of care when considering the vetoes.

House Speaker David Wilkins, R-Greenville, and House Ways and Means Chairman Bobby Harrell, R-Charleston, defended their version of the budget against the governor's vetoes.

"I'm sure he's proud of his vetoes. Likewise, we're proud of what we've done," Wilkins said as he urged the House to vote to override the vetoes on the state's \$5.5 billion budget.

Wilkins called the budget a conservative and fiscally responsible budget.

Sanford's vetoes included changes in how the state might spend \$90 million expected from tougher tax law enforcement. He cut about \$21 million of that out of the spending plan, saying expectations may be too high and agencies shouldn't count on that money.

Harrell said the one-time money was needed to help agencies ease into possible cuts next year.

Sanford trimmed about \$16 million elsewhere in the budget to generate enough money to eliminate a \$155 million deficit left from two years ago.

Wilkins and Harrell said that was unnecessary. The House and Senate have agreed on legislation that would assure any remaining deficit would be paid. Also the Legislature's budget already included items to eliminate the deficit.

"It will pay off remaining deficit just as quick," Wilkins said.

Sanford said he wanted to draw attention to misplaced priorities in the General Assembly.

"We're going to lose some fights and we clearly lost today," Sanford said.

Earlier in the day, Sanford's spokesman said Republican leaders were trying to embarrass the governor with the swift action with the stack of vetoes.

"It is completely disrespectful of the time and effort the governor put into this process and it is not something he is going to lay down and forget about," Sanford's spokesman Will Folks said.

"This clearly is an effort by leaders in the House, like Chairman Bobby Harrell, to embarrass the governor," Folks said.

Harrell, the chief budget writer, said none of this was personal.

"I didn't think when the governor vetoed more items than any governor had in over a decade that he was trying to embarrass us," Harrell said. "I respected his right and his vetoes that he deemed were appropriate. I would hope he

would respect our right to deal with those vetoes."

Harrell also said lawmakers spent a lot of time crafting the budget and came in Wednesday knowing how they would handle the vetoes.

Legislators sent Sanford the 2004-05 budget last week, leaving him five days to consider vetoes.

Since the budget debate began in February, Sanford told legislators they should embrace his priorities. Legislators obliged more or less.

For instance, Sanford pitched the idea of raising more than \$30 million from selling surplus state cars. He wanted most of that cash to cover state worker health insurance costs.

The Legislature agreed to sell the cars but made that deal dependent on a feasibility study, then they earmarked the car money for paying off the state's two-year-old deficit.

Sanford vetoed the feasibility study, saying it was studied before he pitched the idea.

Harrell said it would be irresponsible to just start selling off cars. "Somebody needs to catalog what we need to sell," he said.

Sanford's vetoes raised eyebrows on both sides of the aisle. Democrats were disappointed the governor did not use his veto pen to improve education and health care.

"This governor has to represent all of us," said Rep. Joe Neal, D-Hopkins. "The governor is not doing that with these vetoes."

The lone sustained veto was over a plan to transfer control of the State Accident Fund to the Department of Insurance.

The 105 overrides now go across the hall, where senators are waiting for their chance to deal with Sanford's vetoes.

Sanford vetoed \$5 million in beach renourishment money for Hunting Island State Park. While Sanford said he loves the park, he questioned the wisdom of using scant state money on sand.

His veto message said the state is due for a big hurricane and that could wipe out gains from the project.

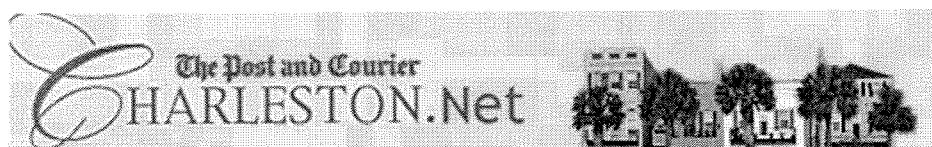
"Since when is the governor the guru of when hurricanes are going to land?" Sen. Scott Richardson, R-Hilton Head Island, said.

Despite numerous conversations Sanford "never told us, 'I'm not going to support this.' ... I resent that," Richardson said.

"The way I read the message is the governor is not in support of renourishment" that's not good for the tourism industry," Richardson said. "The logic he put in there could just as easily apply to Myrtle Beach, Hilton Head or anywhere else."

Sanford said he was thoughtful about each veto and was not worried about any political backlash.

"You clearly step on a toe every time a veto is given," Sanford said.



House overrides Sanford's vetoes

Harsh words follow rejection of governor's cuts

BY CLAY BARBOUR

Of The Post and Courier Staff

COLUMBIA--One by one, in assembly line fashion, the S.C. House of Representatives easily overrode 105 of Gov. Mark Sanford's 106 budget vetoes Wednesday.

The only veto left standing, after a surprisingly debate-free two hours, was that of a proposal to move the State Accident Fund to the Department of Insurance.

It was not a good day for Sanford.

Hours after his vetoes were cast off, Sanford's top legislative priority, an income tax reduction plan, basically died in the Senate.

House members said the whirlwind process of dealing with the vetoes demonstrated their confidence in the compromise budget approved last week by a large margin.

The speed with which Sanford's concerns were dispatched led to harsh words from the governor's office as Sanford spokesman Will Folks accused House Ways and Means Chairman Bobby Harrell, R-Charleston, of trying to "embarrass the governor."

"This is an absolute mockery of the deliberative process," Folks said. "Clearly, Harrell and other leaders in the House don't care about discussing the merits of these issues. They are more concerned with who's the mayor of Importantville."

Speaker of the House David Wilkins, R-Greenville, was angered by Folks' comments.

"I'm offended by that," he said. "They are more interested in winning a vote than the substance of that vote. To get down in the gutter with criticism like that is, frankly, beneath the governor's office."

Harrell was unhappy with what had been said about him.

"We respect the right of the governor to veto," he said. "We did not take offense that a budget we worked on for months was handed back with 106 vetoes, the most we've seen in about 20 years. So he should respect our right to override his vetoes."

Later in the day Sanford backtracked on his spokesman's harsh words, saying he understood Folks' frustration but did not agree with everything he said.

"I do think they made a mockery of deliberative process, but I don't feel they were trying to embarrass me," Sanford said. "That was just the case of a team member being upset after working some long hours on that veto message."

House Minority Leader James Smith, D-Columbia, said Demo-crats voted to override the governor's vetoes because they were "an all-out assault on essential government services."

"South Carolina faces many challenges," he said "Our most essential services have been cut to the bone, and our quality of life has been deeply threatened. This governor shows a complete disregard for state services."

The state Senate is up next. Senators could take up the House's overrides as soon as today.

Sanford announced his vetoes about midnight Tuesday. In a detailed, 43-page veto message, he outlined \$36 million in cuts to the \$5.5 billion portion of the state budget that legislators control.

Notable among the cuts was \$380,000 for the Palmetto Bowl, the first of 15 years' potential funding. Sanford said he supported revamping The Citadel's Johnson Hagood Stadium to accommodate a college football bowl game.

In his veto message, he wrote, "I do not believe that we should subject funds for improvements to a Citadel stadium to the budget process for the next 15 years." He suggested looking to the Capital Reserve Fund for the money.

"Full funding for the project could be secured in time for the stadium to be modified for the proposed December 2005 bowl game," he said.

That scenario wouldn't delay the stadium project, said Tommy McQueeney, chairman of the Charleston Metro Sports Council's bowl committee. The Citadel has been pursuing a dual track, planning to renovate Johnson Hagood and looking at the possibility of building a new stadium where Stoney Field stands.

McQueeney said he expected the veto override to have a tougher time in the Senate.

The Charleston-based military funeral and parade caisson team lost \$99,000 through Sanford's pen, and leader Steve Riggs said Sanford's suggestion that the eight horses be kept at Wateree Correctional Institute Prison Farm outside of Camden wasn't practical.

There's no stable for the eight horses there, he said. Also, the horses need to train weekly, and Riggs said he'd be hard-pressed to get volunteers to leave Charleston at least once a week to drive to Camden so the animals could be

kept polished in their routine.

"How do I get a volunteer to drive 2.5 hours to work a horse?" Riggs said. The team has worked a number of high-profile funerals, including former U.S. Sen. Strom Thurmond's.

Sanford also sliced \$5 million for beach renourishment at Hunting Island and about \$20 million of the controversial "Maybank Money."

State Revenue Director Burnie Maybank promised if his department got an extra \$10 million for tax collection efforts, he would generate \$90 million for state coffers.

Sanford has said he felt uneasy about such a proposal.

"Anytime you've got a quarter of the budget for a critical agency like (the Department of Social Services) tied directly to money that may or may not be there, you've got a problem," he said.

Sanford also took issue with methods, such as the sale of the surplus land, to pay down the state's \$155 million deficit. He said Wednesday the deficit should be paid with "cold, hard cash."

Wilkins took the floor of the House to introduce the vetoes. In a preamble notable for its dry sarcasm, Wilkins noted that Sanford's budget did not deal with the deficit. He pointed out that the executive budget used the sale of the state fleet to fund core budget functions.

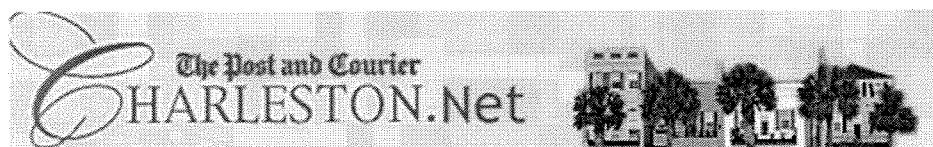
Last year, the governor issued 22 vetoes. This year's list, though long, accounts for less than 1 percent of the budget.

While the House's veto overrides moved quickly, the Senate is expected to move at a slower pace. Some senators say dealing with Sanford's vetoes could take the rest of the session, which ends June 3.

Should that happen, it could come at the cost of the rest of Sanford's legislative agenda.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.charleston.net/stories/052704/sta_27vetoes.shtml



Sanford's tax plan all but dead

BY CLAY BARBOUR
Of The Post and Courier Staff

COLUMBIA--Opponents of Gov. Mark Sanford's income tax reduction plan, his top legislative priority, were successful Wednesday in fighting off the proposal long enough essentially to kill it.

After three failed attempts in seven hours to seat Democrats filibustering the measure, supporters of the governor's plan gave up and adjourned debate. With four days left in the legislative session and the governor's budget vetoes next up on the Senate calendar, the proposal has little chance of revival.

"We just couldn't get the votes," said Senate President Pro Tem Glenn McConnell, R-Charleston. "Unless we can find three more votes somewhere, the fight is over. And that's a shame because it's an economic development plan that South Carolina needs."

The news reached the governor at the end of a long day. Earlier, the S.C. House of Representative overrode 105 of his 106 budget vetoes.

"We've made it three-fourths of the way through the process," Sanford said. "Unfortunately, that last part is the toughest. We have the votes to do it, but the Senate rules have prevented us from getting to a vote. We aren't giving up yet."

Sanford's tax plan would lower the state's highest income tax bracket by .225 percentage points a year for 10 years, lowering the rate from 7 percent to 4.75 percent.

For two days, Senate Democrats, led by John Land of Manning, fought to keep the proposal from the floor. Land and his supporters survived three attempts to end the filibuster Wednesday. The closest Republicans came to ending the filibuster was 25 votes, three short of the needed 28.

"They didn't want to win this," Land said. "They knew what a bad idea this was. We just did the governor a big favor. We kept him from doing serious damage."

For months, Sanford's proposal crept through the Senate. Fearing it might not be addressed by the end of the session June 3, Republican senators forced the issue, attaching it to a bill from the House.

The move let the governor's plan bypass the committee process and come up

first on the Senate calendar. Some senators expected a showdown Tuesday, but too few supporters stayed in the chamber to break the Democrats.

Supporters of the governor's plan avoided that problem Wednesday by invoking a measure preventing any senator from leaving the chamber until the debate ended.

Despite their best efforts to wait out Democrats, the Republicans ended the struggle when it became clear they were not going to win.

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http://www.charleston.net/stories/052704/sta_27senate.shtml



Posted on Thu, May. 27, 2004

Chances dim for income tax cut

Democrats tie up Senate to prevent vote on pet Sanford proposal

By JENNIFER TALHELM
Staff Writer

Gov. Mark Sanford's key legislative priority — a proposed income tax cut — looked all but dead Wednesday night as GOP senators failed to rally enough votes to end a Democratic filibuster of the plan after seven hours of debate.

Democrats locked down the Senate for a second day blocking a vote of the plan, which they say would financially ruin state government. Republicans, who favor the plan and have a majority in the Senate, attempted to up the ante by invoking a rarely used rule requiring all senators remain in the chamber.

But by 7:45 p.m., Republicans had failed in three attempts to get the 28 votes needed to end the Democrats' stonewalling and decided to adjourn for the night. Republicans needed all 27 GOP members and one Democrat to vote against the Democrats' block.

Republicans said they didn't see the need to force senators to stay late when they didn't have the votes. Some said they might be able to get the needed support overnight.

Others were not as optimistic.

"What it does is, it kills the bill," said Sen. David Thomas, R-Greenville, a staunch supporter of the tax cut. "I have no expectation we can pick up one vote from the Democrats."

Sen. John Land, D-Clarendon, who led the opposition to the tax cut, called the day a victory for all South Carolinians. He said Republicans secretly agreed with the Democrats and that was why they gave in early in the evening.

"This was wrong for South Carolina," Land said. The Republicans "can call us tax-and-spend Democrats all they want, but we have saved them from their own mad device."

Some Republicans said as they left Wednesday night that if they can't get the votes, they should move on. There are just four more days until the legislative session ends June 3. In addition to the tax cut, the Senate has yet to deal with most of the major issues in the Legislature this year, including civil court reform, government restructuring and much of Sanford's agenda.

Sanford spokesman Will Folks said the governor would continue to work overnight to get the support he needs. He blamed arcane Senate rules that allow a minority to block a bill the majority favor.

Sanford's plan would cut the state's 7 percent income tax to 4.75 percent in increments over 10 years. Under a version of the plan approved by a Senate committee, the cuts would only come when revenues grew by at least 3 percent.

Opponents say it would benefit only the wealthiest taxpayers — who pay the most tax — and force the state to cut already-lean funding for schools and other services.

But Sanford and other Republicans say it would stimulate the economy and help small businesses grow and hire more employees.

The filibuster and the rule requiring senators to stay in the chamber made for an odd day.

Sergeants at arms were stationed at each entrance, and senators were limited to the floor, side lobbies and the anteroom — with access to restrooms.

Early in the evening, senators used to being able to wander outside to smoke or talk with lobbyists, milled around in the anteroom, chatting with staff. But most were cheerful.

"I don't feel caged up," Land said, grinning. "I can stay caged up as long as (the Republicans) can. I probably can stay longer."

The Senate will have to deal with the vetoes next, and many say they aren't sure whether they will get to them until the filibuster ends.

Reach Talhelm at (803) 771-8339 or jtalhelm@thestate.com. Staff Writer Valerie Bauerlein and the Associated Press contributed to this report.

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Posted on Wed, May. 26, 2004

Prospects dim for Sanford's income tax plan

JIM DAVENPORT
Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. - Hopes dimmed Wednesday for Gov. Mark Sanford's plans to cut the state's top income tax rate after state Senate Republicans failed to muster the votes needed to wrap up debate on the bill.

Sanford wants the state's top income tax rate dropped to 4.75 percent from 7 percent during the next decade, paying for the break through overall growth in the state's economy. He says it will stimulate the economy and create jobs.

Opponents have criticized the plan, noting it helps only taxpayers in the top half of the state's income brackets. They say it also forces the state to limit spending on critical state programs like education and health care.

Republicans needed 28 votes to shut down Democrats who threatened to talk Sanford's centerpiece bill to death. But they could never get more than 25 in three votes taken Wednesday.

"What it does is kill the bill," Sen. David Thomas, R-Fountain Inn, said.

Thomas expected Democrats to crack and concede to some type of compromise. But that didn't happen. "We weren't able to get that kind of public pressure put on the Democrats so that they were ... forced politically to compromise and negotiate," Thomas said.

Republican Sens. Jake Knotts of West Columbia and Luke Rankin of Myrtle Beach voted against shutting down debate. Knotts said he wouldn't vote to limit an individual senator's ability to draw out debate unless that senator had done so against him.

If Knotts and Rankin don't change their minds Thursday, "there's no use even trying" to push the bill again, Thomas said. "It's beating a dead horse."

Democrats declared victory.

"I think they came to the realization that they couldn't win," Senate Minority Leader John Land, D-Manning said.

"We did the governor the greatest favor an opposition party could ever do," Land said. "We saved him from his own bad plan. Because had that passed, South Carolina would have been in an economic straight jacket for 10 years at least."

On Tuesday, the bill's supporters said they would stay and wear down opponents. That resolve faded as Democrats did not budge.

"Frankly what I would hope is that the governor would work overnight to see if he can deliver three votes for us," Sen. Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence, said.

Without those three additions, "I don't hold out any hope for this," Senate President Pro Tem Glenn McConnell, R-Charleston, said.

The bill can still be debated Thursday or in the session's last three days next week, Leatherman said.

Sanford isn't giving up. His spokesman Will Folks says the governor thinks the votes are there to pass the bill. "It's unfortunate that the rules of the Senate are so archaic as to keep us from getting there," Folks said.

Observers said Sanford's vetoes in the state's \$5.5 billion budget, issued late Tuesday night, didn't help the bill's prospects. His 106 vetoes hit projects for at least two Republican allies for the income tax break.

Leatherman lost a nursing program that would be started at Francis Marion University in his district, which he said was critical to ease the state's nursing shortage. Sanford said the program should have been approved through the Commission on Higher Education.

Sen. Scott Richardson, R-Hilton Head Island, lost \$5 million earmarked for pumping sand onto the eroding beaches of Hunting Island State park. Sanford said the state's due for a major hurricane that could wipe out the investment.

"Since when is the governor the guru of when hurricanes are going to land?" Richardson asked.

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Posted on Thu, May. 27, 2004

House stalls on minibottle referendum bill

Associated Press

MYRTLE BEACH, S.C. - South Carolinians might not get the chance to vote on the state's minibottle requirement after all.

Members of the state House of Representatives took two votes on the proposal after a second reading Wednesday, both coming up shy of the two-thirds necessary for approval.

The first vote was 72-34, 11 short of the 83 required. A second attempt drew even less support, passing 63-47.

Rep. Alan Clemmons, R-Myrtle Beach, forced the second vote. Despite its failure, he says he's hopeful the bill can get the two-thirds majority on third reading.

The state's hospitality industry hopes to end South Carolina's rules that alcohol for drinks must come from the 1.7-ounce minibottles rather than free-poured from larger bottles.

An end to the minibottle is also supported by highway safety groups, Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the South Carolina Baptist Convention - all which say minibottles make for a more potent libation than the standard 1.25-ounce cocktail.

Legislative hearings on the bill found that the new lower, 0.08 blood-alcohol level would be reached by many people after one such drink made with a minibottle.

Vida Miller, D-Pawleys Island, voted for the referendum the second time Wednesday. But she said there were too many questions about how the change from mini to larger bottles would be implemented.

Miller says there should be an implementation bill passed alongside the referendum legislation. Last June, the House voted 94-10 for an implementation bill.

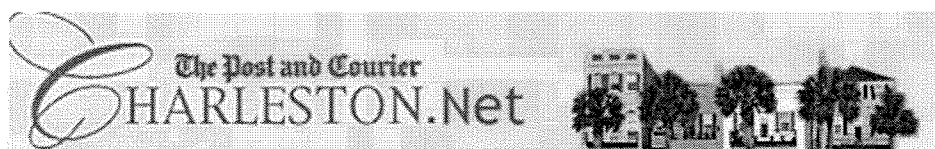
Miller also said she was reluctant to fool with the steady tax revenue that comes from minibottles.

There are conflicting studies about the change: the state economist has said the state will make money by doing away with minibottles, while a study sponsored by minibottle distributors points to a \$6 million loss for South Carolina.

Rep. Tracy Edge, R-North Myrtle Beach, said it's difficult to get a two-thirds majority, especially toward the end of the session when "you've got people playing games."

Edge said he hopes to hold off a third reading of the bill until next week - the final one of the legislative session - "and let the grassroots crowd jump on everybody over the weekend."

Information from: The Sun News, <http://www.myrtlebeachonline.com/>



Audit offers cost-cutting advice for Education Department

Associated Press

COLUMBIA--The state Education Department could save thousands of dollars by reining in spending on employees' hotel and meal expenses and by using an interagency mail service more often, a report says.

The agency also could trim costs by eliminating or consolidating some standardized tests and could streamline some functions to increase efficiency, the Legislative Audit Council said in its report.

However, the report found no improprieties in Education Department spending, including employee pay, an area lawmakers had asked auditors to examine.

"We did not find evidence to indicate that (agency) salaries were inappropriately high, particularly when compared to those of school district employees," the LAC said.

The findings prompted comments from Gov. Mark Sanford, legislative leaders and even the state's political party chairmen. The public school system gets more money than any state agency, garnering more than half the state's annual \$5 billion-plus budget, and Democratic Education Superintendent Inez Tenenbaum is running for the U.S. Senate.

"I'd say this report certainly backs up what we've said all along about getting more dollars to the classroom as well as endorsing the savings we proposed in our executive budget," Sanford said in a statement.

In a response to the report, the Education Department acknowledged some of the problem areas and said measures were being taken to control costs. The agency questioned some of the findings, saying, for example, many traditional mailings cannot be served by interagency service and others have been converted to electronic mail.

Beyond basic cost-cutting measures, the audit said there should be more controls placed on the program that offers salary supplements to national board certified teachers and that some student testing could be reduced or combined.

The Education Department agreed with the report's testing recommendations but took issue with its assessment of the program to pay some teachers extra.

"It is very difficult for candidates to manipulate ... the system; there is new research on the value of the program; and nationally certified teachers do maintain their commitment to student learning and the profession," the agency said.

Some of the changes would require legislative approval, so those would have to wait until next year.

House Ways and Means Chairman Bobby Harrell, who ushered in the Education Accountability Act several years ago, said he would be open to discussing changes such as consolidating standardized tests mandated by law. However, Harrell, R-Charleston, said many of those requirements have helped improve student performance, and "I don't want to do anything to slow down that momentum."

House Speaker David Wilkins, R-Greenville, said the point of the audit was to get more dollars into the classroom, and there were plenty of ways to start that immediately. "The state department ought not to wait on amendments to the accountability act," he said.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT AUDIT FINDINGS

The Legislative Audit Council recently released a report on cost-cutting measures at the Education Department. Among other findings, auditors found in fiscal year 2003 the agency:

- Spent nearly \$4.1 million for travel and often spent more than the federal government's limits for lodging for Education Department and school district employees. The agency said it will require hotel costs above federal guidelines to be proposed to the deputy superintendent of finance.
- Spent \$677,000 for catered meals for school district employees attending training sessions and other in-state meetings. State travel regulations limit state employees' daily reimbursement for in-state meals to \$25, but the department spent as much as \$58 a day per person for meals at its events. The agency said refusing to provide catered meals during meetings would reduce training time and shift costs to school districts that already are strapped. The agency also noted the average cost of a catered meal during the most recent quarter of the fiscal year was \$8.50.
- Has used the interagency mail service at a minimal level compared with other agencies, whose savings have been substantial, and has not used the state contract for mailing services to obtain additional savings. The department has averaged \$376,000 in postage expenditures annually. The agency said many mailings cannot go through the interagency service and other mailings now go out via e-mail.
- Has decentralized procurement and payment for cell phones, which is inefficient, increases costs and does not provide good controls. The agency said it is looking at rate plans to identify savings and has a new cell phone

policy to clarify usage.

-- Paid \$379,000 for dues and memberships and could save by not paying for individual memberships, amounting to about \$110,000, unless the individual is required by the agency to join an organization.

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http://www.charleston.net/stories/052704/sta_27audit.shtml



Area businesses could get millions in federal money

By Caroline Brustad Fossi The Herald

(Published May 27, 2004)

Several York County business and education projects could get more than \$10 million in federal money as part of a defense authorization bill that recently passed the U.S. House.

The bill includes \$31 million requested by U.S. Rep. John Spratt, D-S.C., for South Carolina projects that have ties to the military.

"With all of the focus on our military operations overseas, it is easy to lose sight of the economic impact our defense dollars have back home," Spratt said Wednesday in a statement.

"This year, I submitted requests to the Armed Services Committee for South Carolina projects that I knew could make a difference to our military," Spratt said.

Local recipients could include:

- Jameson Corp. in Clover: \$2 million for making durable, lightweight fluorescent lights used by the U.S. Marine Corps;
- CYTEC in Rock Hill: \$4 million for a making a special type of carbon fiber that's used to strengthen and insulate aircraft and missile bodies;
- ArvinMeritor in York: a portion of \$9.7 million for research on 2.5-ton and 5-ton Army trucks used in combat and combat support. ArvinMeritor makes the brakes for these trucks. The research would involve improving the trucks' armor, and increasing their carrying capacity, among other improvements.
- York Technical College in Rock Hill: \$2 million for a joint York Tech/Clemson University research project aimed at designing a special coating that can help protect military vehicles from corrosion and can adapt to the colors of the surrounding environment.

If approved, the money would not be released until the 2005 fiscal year, which starts Oct. 1, said Chuck Fant, a spokesman for Spratt's office.

Authorized amounts are subject to change and could ultimately be denied as the defense bill goes through the political process, Fant said. First, differences between House and Senate defense bills must be worked out. Then, the requests must get final approval in a separate defense appropriations bill that OKs the money for release.

The fact that the South Carolina requests made it into the House version of the defense bill is a big first step, Fant said. "We've still got work to do," he said. "We're going to fight hard for it."

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Posted on Thu, May. 27, 2004

The case of the missing fire truck

By VALERIE BAUERLEIN
Staff Writer

Once upon a time, there was a shiny new \$550,000 ladder truck in the \$5.5 billion state budget.

It was supposed to go to Powdersville to help augment Anderson County's one ladder truck, stationed 30 minutes away.

It was supposed to help prevent a catastrophic high-rise fire, like the deadly hotel fire in Greenville last winter.

Then, one day, it disappeared.

Or, at least the words "fire truck" were gone from the budget. The \$550,000 for the truck appears to still be there, rolled into an "operating expense" line in the Department of Health and Environmental Control's budget.

But Gov. Mark Sanford could not use his line-item veto to cross out the truck because, technically, he couldn't find it.

So on the second page of his 43-page veto message, he singled it out in a section called "Fiscal Gimmickry."

"Such political pass-throughs have no business being in the state's budget," Sanford wrote. "I would have vetoed the funding for it."

Sanford's staff has spent weeks searching for the truck. Legislators swore privately they would never find it, as it has long been — and likely will continue to be — the prerogative of the General Assembly to put grant money for local projects in the budget.

Caught in the middle — the Department of Health and Environmental Control, the agency that would receive the money and pass it on to Anderson County.

DHEC is beholden to the Legislature for its budget and wants to avoid further cuts to its programs. But director Earl Hunter answers to a board with gubernatorial appointees, who decide whether he keeps his job.

"We are not aware of it being in our budget anywhere," he said Wednesday.

Rep. Dan Cooper, R-Anderson, said his county needs the truck and he will try to find the money — either in the budget or somewhere else.

"We could wind up with another hotel fire like Greenville," Cooper said. "That's what we're trying to avoid. It's got nothing to do with pork."

Cooper has considerable clout in the House, as he chairs a key Ways and Means subcommittee and was one of three House negotiators who worked out budget differences with the Senate.

Sanford said he realizes all legislators want to bring projects home to their constituents. But he wants to know that spending is being prioritized by what's important — not by who has clout.

"If you're going to have realistic budgeting, so many dollars for pencils, for health care, it's important that those be laid out so policy-makers can make an intelligent decision," Sanford said.

Cooper said the governor has his pet projects, too, such as protecting one of his Cabinet agencies, the Department of Social Services. Sanford vetoed money from other agencies to bolster DSS, Cooper said, when he could have moved

money instead from the Conservation Bank to preserve lands.

"But that's his pet project, isn't it?" Cooper said.

Sanford said he would be watching in case any money is spent — even though there is not much he can do about it.

How will this story end?

"You find out at some point," Sanford said, "when a shiny new fire truck shows up."

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Posted on Thu, May. 27, 2004

New bidding ordered for S.C. voting machines

By JIM DuPLESSIS
Staff Writer

New bidding ordered for S.C. voting machines

A state official on Wednesday ordered a new round of bidding for touch-screen voting machines, raising the possibility that some voters will have to use vote using punch cards Nov. 3.

The winning bid by Election Systems and Software Inc. was flawed because it failed to provide fixed prices for some equipment and services for the full seven years of the contract, said Mike Spicer, the state's chief officer in charge of buying computers and other high-tech gear.

If the company had followed the state's request and included all items in its bid, the \$35.5 million bid "could easily exceed" a \$36 million cap set by the S.C. Election Commission, Spicer wrote.

Omaha, Neb.-based Election Systems and Software will submit a new bid and appeal Spicer's decision, spokeswoman Ellen Bogard said.

"We are confident that we can deliver the best and most reliable voting system for South Carolina," she said.

Scott Borchardt, president of losing bidder Palmetto Unilect of West Columbia, said his company might have won if the costs been counted correctly in the first round. He said Spicer's decision "keeps us in the running."

Marci Andino, executive director of the S.C. Election Commission, said further appeals will make it impossible to have new equipment at the polls by Nov. 3.

The state stands to lose \$2 million if it fails to at least replace punch-card machines in the 11 counties still using them, including Lexington and Kershaw counties, she said.

"This has become a highly political issue. There is a lot of money at stake, and someone has to lose," Andino said.

Spicer's office began seeking bids in October 2003 for touch-screens, supporting computer equipment and training to 36 counties that have chosen to participate in the state system.

His office announced April 12 that it intended to award the contract to Election Systems and Software, triggering protests by three of the four losing bidders.

Spicer's ruling on the protests did not address which company offered the best value on voting machines, only whether his office and the bidders followed the state's bidding rules. His decision can be appealed within 10 days to an administrative panel, and then to state court.

The state plans to pay for the machines using \$48 million it expects to receive as part of the federal government's efforts to improve the nation's voting systems. Congress provided the money after punch-card machines led to problems in counting the 2000 presidential election vote in Florida.

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld Florida officials' decision in favor of George Bush, but the majority opinion said states should have uniform voting machines and rules to provide equal protection of rights to all citizens.

Reach DuPlessis at (803) 771-8305 or jduplessis@thestate.com.

MyrtleBeachOnline.com

Posted on Thu, May. 27, 2004

South Carolina

STATE NEWS IN BRIEF

COLUMBIA

Official: Election system contract invalid

A \$32.4 million contract for the installation of voting machines in South Carolina was improperly awarded to a Nebraska company and must be put up for bid again, the state's chief procurement officer said Wednesday.

The contract awarded to Election Systems and Software, which provides more than 74,000 voting systems worldwide, had been challenged by several of the seven losing bidders.

At least one complaint said the executive director of the state Election Commission steered the contract to a partner of her former employer.

Marci Andino, head of the S.C. Election Commission, has denied any conflict of interest.

Mike Spicer, the state's chief procurement officer for computers and other technology, ruled Election Systems and Software failed to respond properly to a requirement in the bid that pricing for each year of a seven-year contract be given.

Spicer said the company had only fixed pricing for two years of the contract.

Andino said Wednesday she was uncertain what steps the commission would take.

She said the state procurement office had cleared the bid at the time it was accepted and the Election Commission thought the bid was in order.

Spicer's decision can be appealed, but that could delay an award by two months or more, jeopardizing the state's plan to deliver the machines and train poll workers for 11 counties still using punch-card ballots before the November election.

Failure to meet that deadline would cost South Carolina \$2 million in federal funds.

CHARLESTON

Oversight of suspects on bail may increase

Lowcountry law enforcement officers may soon be able to keep a closer eye on bail bondsmen tracking criminal defendants through a satellite monitoring system.

Two of the three bondsmen who offer satellite monitoring in the area have pledged to provide computer passwords to allow authorities to randomly check on people placed on the tracking system, said prosecutor Ralph Hoisington.

Bondsmen would still have primary responsibility for monitoring offenders and alerting victims to violations, but law enforcement officers would be able to make sure bail bondsmen are living up to their responsibilities, Hoisington said.

The prosecution asked judges to stop putting defendants on the tracking system after a man charged with assault disappeared for a week in April when his monitor battery died and the system lost his signal.

Charleston County Magistrate Jack Guedalia has agreed to put new defendants on monitors once law enforcement agencies have direct access to the monitoring system. Hoisington wants to make that a mandatory condition of the program.

GREENVILLE

Paralegal admits to stealing mortgage funds

A paralegal has pleaded guilty to wire fraud after prosecutors said she stole more than \$1 million in mortgage payoffs during a four-year span.

Anna M. Knox, 54, of Travelers Rest, pleaded guilty Tuesday, but she could have kept the scam going for years had she not turned herself in, U.S. Attorney Kevin McDonald said.

Knox told authorities that while working as a paralegal for a Greenville attorney, she began skimming deposits made into an escrow account, McDonald said. After she came forward, agents discovered \$1.151 million missing, he said.

She will be sentenced by U.S. District Judge Henry Floyd after a pre-sentence report is completed. Knox faces up to 30 years in prison and a \$1 million fine, McDonald said.

Knox's attorney Joe Watson said she first used the money four years ago because she was having financial problems.
HILTON HEAD ISLAND

Couple with famous name plagued by calls

It's the wrong time to be a Karpinski on Hilton Head Island.

Just ask Ken and Kathlyn Karpinski, who happen to share a location and the same name as Brig. Gen. Janis Karpinski, an island resident who commanded the prison where pictures were taken of U.S. soldiers mistreating Iraqi prisoners. They also get many of her media calls from around the country.

"We don't even know her," Kathlyn Karpinski said. "We've gotten calls from probably every news organization in America," at all hours.

S.C. phone listings show eight Karpinskis. The only one on Hilton Head is listed as K. Karpinski. So the calls have come in from the likes of CNN's Wolf Blitzer, the Chicago Tribune and MSNBC.

Janis Karpinski and her husband, George, have an unlisted number for their residence on Point Comfort Road.

Janis Karpinski has been in the public spotlight since the photos of prisoner abuse became public. This week, Army officials in Washington said she was relieved of her command and suspended from active duty.

Janis Karpinski has responded in numerous interviews that military leaders are using her as a scapegoat.

COLUMBIA

Sponsors sought to reunite Tuskegee pilots

Organizers are seeking sponsors to help bring 50 veterans to the Tuskegee Airmen 60th Anniversary Reunion this November.

The Celebrate Freedom Foundation is seeking \$2,500 sponsorships to help bring at least one airman from each of the group's 47 national chapters. Each donation will pay for travel expenses, room and board.

The reunion will be held in conjunction with the foundation's Celebrate Freedom Festival 2004.

The squadron of black fighter pilots' World War II exploits helped to abolish segregation in the armed forces. The airmen never lost a bomber they escorted.

From wire reports

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Posted on Thu, May. 27, 2004

State appeals court overturns convictions

Associated Press

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, S.C. - The state Court of Appeals has overturned convictions on rape and first-degree burglary against a Hilton Head Island man, but upheld a kidnapping conviction that will keep him in prison for life.

John Arnold Brinson, 46, was given three life sentences in October 2000 after he was convicted of rape, burglary and kidnapping from an attack on a woman the previous December.

Brinson's attorneys argued in February before the three-judge panel that two of the three indictments were wrongly changed prior to trial. They also argued that statements by an official prejudiced the jury and a mistrial should have been declared.

Two of the three judges agreed that indictments for rape and first-degree burglary against Brinson should be dismissed. However, the judges unanimously held the statements by Beaufort County Sheriff's Office Lt. Bob Bromage were harmless given other overwhelming trial evidence against Brinson.

"I'm very happy for the victim and very happy for Beaufort County," said Assistant Solicitor Duffie Stone, who prosecuted the original case. "None of this becomes a big deal as long as the court upholds one of these convictions."

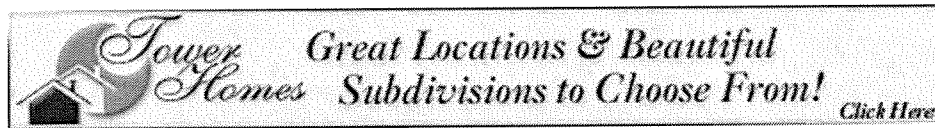
Brinson can appeal the ruling.

After the appeals process is done, prosecutors can choose to re-indict Brinson on the overturned charges.

Judge Jasper M. Cureton wrote the majority opinion with Judge Thomas E. Huff in agreement. Judge H. Samuel Stilwell dissented in part, agreeing that the burglary conviction should be overturned but concluding that the rape conviction should stand.

Information from: The Island Packet, <http://www.islandpacket.com>

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Smith portrait unveiled at Statehouse

Posted Wednesday, May 26, 2004 - 7:55 pm

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By Tim Smith
CAPITAL BUREAU

COLUMBIA — J. Carol Williams still remembers the day after a fire in 1976 that destroyed his father's tire business in Greer when state Sen. Verne Smith, a tire business competitor, showed up with an offer to loan his dad the funds to get started again.

It wasn't the last act of kindness Smith did for the Williams family, he said, who like many in Greer and elsewhere think of Smith as a favorite uncle.

"He's probably one of the greatest humanitarians who ever came out of South Carolina," Williams said. "That's it in a nutshell."

On Wednesday, friends, family and colleagues filled the Senate chamber in Columbia to pay tribute to the 79-year-old senator.

The occasion was the unveiling of his portrait on the upper level of the chamber, an honor that has been bestowed during the Senate's history on about two dozen South Carolina military heroes, governors, U.S. senators and other historical figures.

Smith hugged family members and well-wishers, posed for photos and bellowed laughter throughout the chamber, as colleagues and friends swapped tales and praised the



Jeff Olmert unveils the portrait of Sen. Verne Smith inside the S.C. Senate chambers Wednesday morning. Olmert, a Greenville resident, is Sen. Smith's grandson. Staff/Owen Riley Jr.

[e-mail this story](#)

senator.

"My heart is just full of thanksgiving," Smith told the assembly, with his wife of 57 years, Jean, by his side.

The portrait now hangs among some of the state's political icons, including former U.S. Vice President John C. Calhoun, former U.S. Sen. Strom Thurmond and Smith's favorite, former Gov. Wade Hampton.

A Senate committee votes on portraits. The last portrait hung was of Sen. John Drummond of Greenwood — two years ago.

The painting is the latest in a series of honors for Smith, who has served in the Senate for 32 years.

Colleagues on Wednesday credited Smith for shaping the state's Medicaid system for the poor, for ensuring health care coverage for senior citizens and children, and for the development of the state's technical college system, as well as for improvements to Upstate roads.

He also has been largely credited for state funding for Greenville's Peace Center for the Performing Arts, the Governor's School for the Arts in Greenville and Greenville Technical College.

But to his constituents, it has been his work on their behalf that has been most valued.

Pat Smith is a neighbor of the senator's. Recently, she said, her brother lost his business and then broke his hip. He also learned he needed a liver transplant.

She and her husband, both in their 70s, took in their brother, she said, but knew they couldn't give him the care he needed. She turned to Smith, who helped him get on Medicaid. She said her brother as a result is now in a nursing home and happy.

"He just worked a miracle," she said of Smith. "I don't know what I would have done without him."

Buck Sudduth also lives in Greer. The 79-year-old resident recalled the time a state highway project left his embankment too steep to mow. He mentioned it to Smith.

"He said, 'Let me look at it,'" Sudduth said. "I got him in my pickup and we looked at it. He said, 'Well, Buck, we'll see.'"

Sudduth said the embankment was fixed.

"They don't come any better than Verne," he said. "He'll help anybody."

That theme was repeated in speeches by colleagues Wednesday.

Sen. Kay Patterson, a Columbia Democrat, praised Smith for his work on behalf of the sick, elderly and children. "Verne Smith looked out for those who couldn't look out for themselves," he said.



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Senate Majority Leader Hugh Leatherman, a Florence Republican and friend of Smith's for many years, said Smith has brought passion to his job as a senator. "Verne Smith's place in history was long secured before this date," he said.

Sen. Tom Moore, an Aiken Democrat, recalled the day when another senator became angry at Moore and showed up at his desk threatening to "whip my posterior."

"Sen. Smith stood up and said, 'You're going to have to whip me first,'" Moore quoted Smith as saying.

The portrait was unveiled by Smith's grandson, Jefferson Olmert.

Smith told *The Greenville News* that he brought Olmert to the chamber after he became a senator and Olmert was a young boy. Olmert, he said, was fascinated at the huge, imposing portrait of Calhoun, which hangs behind the rostrum.

"Why granddaddy," Smith recalled Olmert saying as he pointed to Calhoun's portrait, "that's Count Dracula."

Smith came to the Senate in 1972, a Democrat and Greer businessman already seasoned in leadership through church offices and service on the Greer Public Works Commission. He helped get Lake Robinson built as a water supply source.

The Senate then was run by senior senators, he said, who had little use for freshman lawmakers. "I was like a visitor," he said. "I thought it was the worst mistake I had ever made."

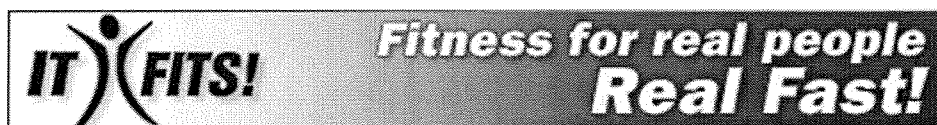
But as the Legislature evolved and Smith climbed the seniority ladder, he was awarded chairmanships, the first on the Medical Affairs Committee. He became interested in the health care for the poor and helped develop the state's Medicaid program, serving as the champion ever since of the state's Medicaid recipients.

He now is chairman of the Senate's Labor, Commerce and Industry Committee and of the panel dealing with Medicaid issues.

He switched party affiliations in 2001 after feeling alienated by Democratic leaders.

Smith is the recipient of The Order of the Palmetto and three honorary doctorates for his work in the areas of health care education and public service. But he said the portrait means more to him than any other honor except his Eagle Scout award.

"It really does touch me down deep in my heart," he said. "I never dreamed that could happen to me."



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HILTON HEAD ISLAND - BLUFFTON S.C.

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Doctor's status unclear

Suspension order removed from Web

BY E.J. SCHULTZ, *The Island Packet*

Other stories by E.J. Schultz

Published Thursday, May 27th, 2004

Tuesday's order temporarily suspending local cardiologist James D. Johnston's medical license was removed from public view Wednesday, and officials with the state Board of Medical Examiners said they could not talk about the action.

Citing alcohol abuse that put the public at risk, the board Tuesday suspended Johnston's license and posted the notice on its Web site. But that notice was removed from the site Wednesday afternoon, less than 24 hours after it was posted, and Johnston's license is listed on the site as "in good standing" with "no disciplinary action taken by the board."

Board officials would only say Wednesday, "As of this afternoon, we are not allowed to comment at all on this case."

It is not clear whether Johnston was practicing medicine Wednesday. A receptionist answering the phone Wednesday afternoon at his island office said the doctor was seeing patients. Officials from Hilton Head Regional Medical Center did not return repeated calls for comment.

In Tuesday's suspension order, the board states that Johnston was addicted to alcohol to such a degree that he constituted a "serious threat to the public health, safety, and welfare." It cited an emergency room incident at Hilton Head Regional Medical Center this past March in which Johnston allegedly attempted to treat a patient while impaired.

Johnston was suspended from the island hospital the day the emergency room incident allegedly occurred, according to a letter sent to the board by hospital medical director Dr. Glenn Love. The suspension was lifted 10 days later, according to the board.

Tuesday's order was not the first time the state medical examiners board has taken action against Johnston. In 2001, the board temporarily suspended his license, citing several alcohol-related arrests. But that order quickly was overturned by state Administrative Law Judge C. Dukes Scott, who ruled that the board "presented no competent evidence" that Johnston had a drinking problem.

Another administrative law judge, Marvin Kittrell, later ruled that Johnston's case be sealed. The Oct. 5, 2001, order states that all proceedings before the board be kept confidential, except final orders.

It is not clear whether Kittrell's 2001 ruling to seal the records in Johnston's case had any bearing on Wednesday's removal of Johnston's suspension from the board Web site, or whether a separate order had been issued.

Officials in the state Administrative Law Court could not be reached for comment Wednesday. The local lawyer who has represented Johnston in past matters with the board, Stephen Carter, did not return calls for comment.

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Posted on Thu, May. 27, 2004

Black bikers' lawsuit progresses

Knight Ridder Newspapers

As the Grand Strand gears up for Atlantic Beach Bikefest later this week, there has been some movement on one of two discrimination lawsuits filed last year and some minor changes to the way traffic will be handled.

Plaintiffs in the suits filed last year by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People say treatment during Bikefest, which attracts predominantly black visitors, is different from that given to visitors to the annual Myrtle Beach Harley-Davidson Dealers Association Bike Rally held earlier in May. The Harley-Davidson crowd is mostly white.

The lawsuit against the city of Myrtle Beach, its police chief and Horry County is moving toward trial in federal court. The one against the Yachtsman Resort Hotel is moving toward a negotiated settlement.

Despite the suits, some plaintiffs say they will return this weekend to the fest, which attracts about 400,000 people.

Stephen Green of the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce said he is not sure what effect the lawsuits have had on tourism.

"Some places may or may not have lost business, but we don't know," he said.

Traffic during the event will continue to travel one way southbound on Ocean Boulevard but with more opportunities for motorists to avoid the usual congestion on that road, Myrtle Beach police said.

It is the only traffic change city officials plan for the event. The traffic pattern was cited in one lawsuit as discriminatory.

Myrtle Beach officials say the one-way traffic pattern is an effective control.

"The one-way traffic management has proven over the past few years that it works," said Mark Kruea, city spokesman.

He said closing two lanes of Ocean Boulevard from 29th Avenue North south until it meets Kings Highway makes emergency vehicle access easier.

Police Chief Warren Gall said the decision to allow more turns from Ocean Boulevard — six total — was not made in response to the lawsuit.

"I hope it's a release valve for people who get frustrated in the heavy traffic," Gall said.

The lawyer representing the plaintiffs says this is not enough.

"It will be disappointing if they don't change that traffic pattern," said Reed Colfax, a lawyer from the Washington Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, which represents the NAACP and other plaintiffs.

The NAACP sued Myrtle Beach and the Yachtsman hotel May 20, 2003. Lawyers also filed an administrative complaint with the S.C. Human Relations Commission, saying 28 local restaurants closed their doors during the bike fest to avoid serving blacks.

The suit against the Yachtsman, which accuses the hotel of using inflated rates and stiff rules to drive away black guests, might be near a settlement, Colfax said.

He would not release details of the proposal, but said, "We hope there will be a settlement before 2005."

Reynolds Williams, lawyer for the Yachtsman, would not confirm nor deny the talks. He said the Yachtsman has made changes for this year's event, but he would not be specific.

"We believe the changes are mutually agreeable," Williams said.

Talks with the city have been less successful, Colfax said.

"We have made no progress on the settlement front with the city," he said.

Kruea said the city does not plan to settle.

"The city will defend itself," he said.

Since last year, Colfax said, one plaintiff has been added to the Yachtsman lawsuit and four to the suit against the city.

In addition, Colfax said more restaurants have been named in the Human Relations Commission complaint, but he would not say how many.

Some people who filed the complaint have received authorization from the commission to sue at least five of the restaurants, but no suits have been filed, Colfax said.

Clifton White, a plaintiff in the Yachtsman case, plans to arrive Friday. The N.C. Farm Bureau employee from Fayetteville, N.C., has missed only two Bikefests since 1988.

White attended the Harley-Davidson rally this month and said the difference in traffic restrictions, police enforcement and business is evident.

"It's like Nazi Germany," he said of the welcome bikers receive during Bikefest.

Proving discrimination is difficult, said David Kairys, a professor of law at Temple University who studies racial discrimination cases. "There's a heavy burden on the plaintiffs," he said.



Posted on Thu, May. 27, 2004



State does not need another school board

IT IS DISHEARTENING to see the inordinate focus placed in recent days on a charter school bill moving through the General Assembly. We have long endorsed charter schools as one tool for injecting some innovation into the public school system. They remain a viable option for offering choice to some students who might benefit from the option.

However, there are those individuals, including our governor, who exhibit a misplaced zeal over charter schools' potential. The creation of some charter schools will be a solution for some children in some communities with strong and motivated local support. However, they must not be viewed as a statewide panacea, while all of the other public schools' real and glaring needs are ignored.

Charter schools are public schools in one sense, in that they receive public dollars to operate. But they are exempt from some of the rules that govern traditional public school operations. That is a plus if it means that charter schools can offer smaller class sizes or innovative instruction tailored to the specific needs of a student population. But flexibility is a bad idea if it means a lack of financial or academic accountability. South Carolina doesn't have a mind or a dollar to waste on any fly-by-night operations.

Charter schools are beginning to take off in our state after a slow start. However, we're not the last in the nation on this count — some states don't allow charter schools at all. Not all of the delay in South Carolina can be called foot-dragging. The slow pace of charter school creation to date has allowed for some sensible safeguards, including rules to ensure that charter schools don't become segregationist academies.

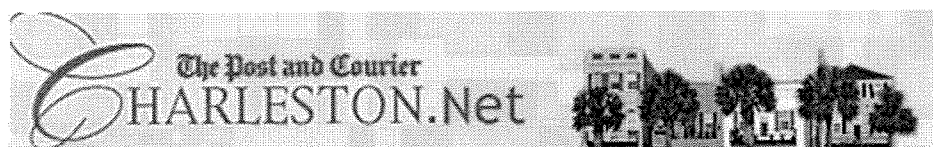
At the same time, it was clear that some local school districts hampered the creation of charter schools. That is why we supported a move that allowed those schools whose applications were denied locally to appeal to the State Board of Education. Local trustees and the state should be open to innovation when it is viable and should not put up unnecessary roadblocks.

However, we are not convinced a change proposed in the latest charter school legislation is necessary. It would create yet another charter school authorizing board, a state panel appointed by politicians. This Carolina Public Charter School District Board of Trustees is unnecessary duplication, setting up yet another state board and bureaucracy.

Charter schools will be a route to better academic performance for some children. We see evidence that their numbers are increasing in South Carolina at a reasonable rate. However, they are no panacea for many of the enduring educational woes in our state. South Carolina must concentrate on early childhood education for our youngest citizens who are not ready for school. We must adequately fund public school operations all over the state, whether those schools are charter schools or their more traditional peers.

Job one in public education in South Carolina is being ignored while our state leaders focus their attention on side issues such as creating this new board. Let's encourage the present system, which is resulting in new charter schools around the state. And more importantly, let's encourage lawmakers to stay focused on the real issues and real needs in public education today.

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Disappointing House dismissal of Sanford's fiscal concerns

Gov. Mark Sanford has tried, and the odds now say he will fail, to get the Legislature to live within what he believes to be the state's fiscal means. Experience says the governor is right to be wary of a budget that includes \$90 million in anticipated revenue not certified by the Board of Economic Advisers. Unfortunately, his more conservative approach was overwhelmingly rejected by the House of Representatives Wednesday when it brushed aside all but one of his 106 budget vetoes.

For the governor it is a bitter disappointment, particularly in view of the unprecedented time he has spent in the past 12 months on the state's fiscal affairs. He devoted last summer to budget meetings with all the state agencies and delivered to the Legislature early this year the most detailed budget ever presented by a South Carolina governor.

A key goal has been to erase a previous unconstitutional \$155 million deficit, an aim the legislative leadership also embraced. While the governor acknowledges that the budget makes a significant \$90 million down payment toward eliminating the debt, he argues that more should have come from the anticipated surplus instead of going to other programs. A bill pending in the Senate would add general reserve funds to the debt payment for a total of \$139 million, still some \$16 million short. The governor also notes the general reserve fund is \$100 million shy of its constitutionally required minimum.

House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bobby Harrell counters that the payment on the deficit isn't really short since the \$16 million will come from the sale of state cars and property. The governor responds that the money is by no means certain and deficit reduction should have been a priority.

Of even greater uncertainty, however, is some \$90 million of uncertified revenue -- being described as "Maybank money" -- that is being used in the budget. The description comes from the fact that the funds are expected to be generated by the Department of Revenue -- headed by Burnet R. Maybank Jr. -- primarily by going after out-of-state firms that don't now pay sales tax. The governor cited in his veto message the BEA's refusal to certify the estimate and the reservations that earlier had been expressed in the Senate about counting on so much from increased collections.

The governor said he toyed with vetoing the total \$90 million. He opted instead to veto some \$21 million of "Maybank money" allocated to other

agencies so that the Department of Social Services wouldn't be so hard hit if all the money doesn't materialize. His vetoes included cuts in a variety of agencies that would balance out his proposed reductions in anticipated revenue.

The governor couldn't have been surprised that his proposed trims got such a cold shoulder, particularly since they were so wide-ranging and affected so many lawmakers' home turf. He certainly didn't spare his own backyard, proposing to eliminate, for example, funds for the culinary arts school at Charleston's Trident Technical College because he didn't feel it was constitutionally authorized; some \$5 million for beach renourishment at Hunting Island State Park; and \$380,000 for the Palmetto Bowl for Charleston. The governor said he supports the Palmetto Bowl project but insists the money should come from the Capital Reserve Fund.

But the 43-page veto message, which included some pats for the lawmakers along with the pans, was rejected out of hand by the House. Rep. Harrell disagrees that the quick dismissal of the huge veto package took place without due consideration. He argues that the budget was roundly debated in both bodies and discussed at length in caucuses Wednesday. He says there simply was disagreement with the governor's basic objections to the budget.

Rep. Harrell contends that the Legislature is well aware that the \$90 million in "Maybank money" is a one-time revenue estimate. But the alternative, he says, would have been even deeper budget cuts for agencies that already had been critically wounded. The Legislature, he contends, has put all the agencies on notice that the money won't be there next year.

Clearly, the lawmakers and the governor have different perspectives. There's little doubt that the legislative outlook is colored not only by protecting hometown constituencies but by the fact that this is an election year. As the governor observes, the only entity that has the capacity to look at the big, statewide picture is the executive branch.

From Gov. Sanford's perspective, the budget not only digs the state into deeper fiscal trouble but includes some constitutionally troubling expenditures. Members of the House should have given the public the benefit of their reasoning for rejecting his arguments Wednesday. Public debate is the least that should be expected from the Senate.

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Anderson for Senate Dist. 7

Posted Wednesday, May 26, 2004 - 6:46 pm

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State Sen. Anderson has served well

in a long, distinguished career.

He has earned another term.

The Greenville News endorses Ralph Anderson for re-election to the state Senate in District 7. He is locked in a rematch with Debra J. Gammons in the June 8 Democratic primary. There is no Republican opposition in the fall.

Anderson, at 76 and at the end of his second term, remains an effective and needed voice in the Senate for the poor and the elderly. District 7 encompasses some of this county's wealthiest and poorest neighborhoods. In nearly 23 years of elected office — 14 in the General Assembly — Anderson has served most of the same voters and has consistently dedicated his service to those in need. That makes him an important voice in the Senate.

Anderson has been on the responsible side of issues that, unfortunately, made little headway in the Legislature. He was an early and vocal supporter of raising the state's cigarette tax and the tax on beer and wine to provide a stable revenue stream to our financially shaky Medicaid program. He supports a strong seat belt law. And from his seat on the Senate Corrections and Penology Committee, Anderson has been one of only a few in the General Assembly to advocate sending more resources to a prison system that is overcrowded, understaffed and increasingly dangerous.

Anderson has also been one of the most dependable votes for public education, as he was one of the 12 senators to earn a perfect score on the South Carolina Education Association's legislative report card.

He has been a moderating influence and a voice of reason in a body that can be notoriously divisive and petty. In the future, he should use that standing to fight the

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abuse of Senate customs. A recent example is the Senate filibuster that gave a single senator the power to block a strong seat-belt law. Principled lawmakers like Anderson must make sure that process works as intended.

Gammons, who is an assistant Greenville city attorney, has not made a persuasive case for replacing Sen. Anderson, although against weaker opposition she might be an attractive candidate. But in Anderson, District 7 voters have a seasoned public servant who is typically above petty politics and who consistently casts enlightened votes. He deserves four more years.



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The Greenville News

FIRST Robotics is a win-win for South Carolina

Posted Wednesday, May 26, 2004 - 10:00 pm


By Ralph White


Recently, the University of South Carolina College of Engineering and Technology, the S.C. Department of Education and BellSouth received the Technology in Education award for their roles in sponsoring the FIRST Robotics competition at the Colonial Center in Columbia.

The award was presented by the Columbia Information Technology Council. But the real winners were the 1,000 students who came from all over the country to participate in the inaugural Palmetto FIRST Robotics regional competition in Columbia, the first one in South Carolina.

Upstate Teams 343 from Seneca, 1319 from Mauldin and 281 from Greenville advanced to their division finals in the international FIRST Robotics Championship in Atlanta, but every student walked away a winner from the Columbia competition because of their sense of accomplishment and a feeling that that they were part of something bigger.

The energy and excitement were palpable as hundreds of students from South Carolina and the nation put their robots to the test. The event was the culmination of months of planning, design, mechanical work and practice to ensure that their robots would perform the assigned tasks.

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Guest column

- **Ralph White:** FIRST Robotics is a win-win for South Carolina (05/26/04)
- **Jim DeMint:** America's future lies in creating an ownership society (05/24/04)
- **Edwin Leap:** God uses our children to teach us some humility (05/24/04)
- **Aron Tannenbaum:** Don't blame Jews or Israel for Iraq war (05/23/04)
- **Rallie Liston:** Combining school districts won't benefit students (05/23/04)

More details

Dr. Ralph White is dean of the College of Engineering and Information Technology at the University of South Carolina. USC is a partner with BellSouth, the State Department of Education and the S.C. Chamber of Commerce in the FIRST Robotics program in South Carolina.

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And not just for the obvious reasons, such as honing science and math skills. In addition to gaining self-confidence, students learned the value of teamwork and networking. Thanks to the help of some Michigan students, a Greenville team actually got the help to rebuild their robot.

Forty-two teams from throughout South Carolina, the nation and Puerto Rico competed in what most participated described as the best-run FIRST Robotics competition they had ever seen. But the event could not have taken place, much less been successful, without the support and enthusiasm of hundreds of teachers, parents, sponsors, volunteers, team mentors and area businesses and industries.

FIRST Robotics is a classic example of what can be achieved when business and industry team up with schools in their communities. In fact, had it not been for the professional and financial backing of many businesses, some FIRST Robotics teams would not have made it to the regional competition. Just ask the dozens of Upstate high school students and their sponsors.

Participating schools included Donaldson Career Center, Christ Church Episcopal High School, St. Joseph's High School, J.L. Mann High School, Greenville Technical Charter High School, Southside High School, Carolina Academy, Pendleton High School and Tri-County Technical College, Seneca High School, West-Oak High School, Walhalla High School, Tamassee-Salem High School, Hamilton Career Center, Hillcrest High School and Mauldin High School.

Upstate sponsors included BellSouth Pioneers, Michelin, Lockheed Martin, Duke Energy, Clemson University, Greenville Technical College, Tri-County Tech, Greenville Technical College, Greenville County Schools and the Oconee-Business Education Partnership. FIRST Robotics itself was sponsored by BellSouth, which gave \$1 million toward the project, USC's College of Engineering and Information Technology, the S.C. Department of Education and the S.C. Chamber of Commerce.

Many ask what FIRST Robotics is.

The competition, which is sponsored by the FIRST Corp. and held at sites around the country, is a way to get students excited about science and math. It builds self-confidence, knowledge and life skills while motivating young people to pursue opportunities in science, technology and engineering.

FIRST provides an education and career path for young people who might not otherwise discover their own aptitude for science and math. FIRST students also are eligible for more than \$3.8 million in scholarship funds to continue their education.

A survey showed that students who participated in FIRST competition showed improved attitudes toward science, math, teamwork and the working world.

And the sponsors also win.

The same study also showed that a majority of students indicated an interest in working for the company that mentored them either through a student internship or after completing their education.

Intangible, the mentors are rewarded with renewed inspiration and the realization that they are a student's vital link to the real world.

Clearly, FIRST Robotics is a win-win for the state.

Involvement in children's lives is proven as an essential component for developing young people's minds. It's important that businesses participate in these kinds of programs. The future of our state depends on it.

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Posted on Thu, May. 27, 2004



County officials should be chosen in nonpartisan elections

By WARREN BOLTON
Associate Editor

YOU'D THINK IT would be hard to inject partisan politics into the delivery of basic services such as garbage collection, water and sewer and road resurfacing.

But in my years of covering Richland County government I saw it happen time and again. There is no such thing as a Democratic or Republican sewer plant, but officials from opposing parties can find a way to create a stink over it. In the process, residents get hurt because of uneven, inconsistent services.

That's why county councils, just like school board members and city councils, should be elected on a nonpartisan basis. Other offices, such as auditor, clerk of court, treasurer and coroner, should be nonpartisan as well.

I'd like to see those administrative offices appointed. But if we've got to elect them, let's remove the party labels.

Our editorial board talked to 23 candidates for offices in Richland and Lexington counties who will be on the ballot in the June primary. Most of them agreed it would be better to elect the positions on a nonpartisan basis.

Some said it would encourage people to vote for the best candidates. Partisan races cause voters to put blinders on and cast ballots strictly along party lines, they said.

Debbie Summers, a candidate for Lexington County Council District 4, said she has been a Republican all her life, but she believes nonpartisan council elections would be best.

"I know that 99.9 percent of the citizens in Lexington County are Republicans," she said. "That's one of the first things they ask when you go to the door: 'Are you a Republican?'"

But she said once you talk to people for a while, they're more interested in what candidates are going to do to improve services.

Val Hutchinson, a Republican candidate in Richland Council District 9, said partisan elections add unnecessary contention. Nonpartisan elections would allow council members to be practical and not so ideological, Ms. Hutchinson said. "I'm not a politically oriented person. I'm an issue-oriented person."

Chris Harmon, a GOP candidate for Lexington County auditor, favors nonpartisan elections. "I'm not sure what a Republican auditor is going to do differently from a Democratic auditor," he said. "It's just like coroner."

The man Mr. Harmon is challenging, Lexington County Auditor Art Guerry, is one of the few we talked to who favors keeping county elections partisan. Mr. Guerry said those seeking the office are attempting to influence people and should be able to do so under a party banner.

This editorial board has pushed for nonpartisan elections on the county level for years. Some county councils have asked the Legislature to allow nonpartisan elections. There have even been legislators — including Richland County's Sen. Darrell Jackson and former Rep. Bubba Cromer — who have sponsored bills to make council elections nonpartisan. Unfortunately, the proposals have never gotten enough support.

But those who support nonpartisan elections should not give up in seeking this worthwhile change. Not only can partisan politics on the local level negatively affect services, it can destroy citizens' trust and expectations of government.

Fortunately, Richland County Council is not nearly as partisan as it was when I covered it in the late '80s and early

'90s. But when it was, it left a bad taste in the mouths of residents.

I remember one instance in which a couple had gotten frustrated with the way Richland County handled the scraping of dirt roads. Instead of coming up with a set policy, the county's posture depended on which party was in power on the council.

The dirt road this couple lived on would wash out and make it difficult for residents and emergency vehicles to get in and out. Over the years, the county would scrape the road to make it safer. But that was an off-and-on thing: off if the Republicans controlled the council, on if the Democrats had the majority. At one point, the county's position on dirt roads shifted three times in six years.

Eliminating partisan elections would begin to address such situations. While people would still bring different philosophies to the table, I believe the change would encourage stronger candidates to run. Many who would be strong candidates now refuse to associate themselves with the nasty election process spearheaded by the political parties. (And let's not forget that nonpartisan elections eliminate the cost of holding primaries.)

Nonpartisan elections have worked well in Columbia, where the seven-member council works harmoniously, for the most part, despite the fact that members' political philosophies vary widely.

Elected officials are likely to be more deliberative and consider the good of all in an atmosphere not charged by partisanship.

Richland County Council Chairwoman Bernice Scott, seeking reelection in District 10, said partisan politics has spoiled the tone on the state and national level, even up to the presidency. It may be time for nonpartisan council elections, the Democrat said.

"You know what we've got over at the State House. What do we have over there? A mess," Ms. Scott said. "If that is going to help us work closer together, so be it."

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